

Public Health Alert

October 2, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In cooperation with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, Southwest District Health (SWDH) is issuing a health alert for Lake Lowell, located in Canyon County. Recent samples taken from the lake indicate that high concentrations of toxin-producing blue-green algae are present and may cause illness to humans and animals.

Blue-green algae bacteria occur naturally. Blue-green algae blooms occur in waters with high levels of nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. Under certain conditions, some types of algae can release toxins into the water that are harmful to people, pets, and livestock. The blooms are generally green, or blue-green, and may form thick mats along shorelines. These may look like a surface scum, resembling pea soup and can have an unpleasant odor or stench.

SWDH and DEQ advise the following precautions be taken where blue-green algae blooms are known to be present:

- Humans, pets, and livestock should not drink the lake water.
- Humans and animals should stay out of the lake. Swimming, wading, or other activities with full body contact of lake water should be avoided.
- Fish should be cleaned and rinsed with clean water. Only the fillet portion should be consumed. All other parts should be discarded.
- Do not allow pets to eat dried algae.
- If lake water contacts skin or pet fur, wash with clean potable water as soon as possible.
- Areas of visible algae accumulation should be avoided.

“Samples from Lake Lowell contain high concentrations of blue-green algae that may produce toxins harmful to people and animals. Although the swimming and boating season for Lake Lowell has ended, we want to advise people who may be in contact with water at Lake Lowell, such as anglers or hunters, to be aware of these conditions and take proper precautions,” said Stephanie Jenkins, Watershed Analyst for DEQ’s Boise Regional Office.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who are exposed to water with high concentrations of blue-green algae may experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty breathing, skin irritation, allergic responses, liver damage, or neurotoxic reactions such as tingling fingers and toes. Symptoms in humans are rare, but anyone with symptoms should seek medical attention. Boiling or filtering the water will not remove blue-green algae toxins.

Pets and livestock are vulnerable to blue-green algae and should stay out of water where blooms are visible. Pets and livestock can be exposed to blue-green algae through drinking, swimming, or self-grooming. A reaction will likely require immediate veterinary attention.

Canal users should take precautions for animal water facilities. Canals that may be affected are the Deer Flat Nampa Canal, managed by the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District, and the Deer Flat Caldwell, Low Line and North Canals, managed by the Boise Project Board of Control.

Lake Lowell is part of the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge which is managed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services.

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